

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

The gift and habit of confession



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

If God's part is to offer forgiveness and restoration, what is our part?



Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

How do I receive God's salvation in my lived experience? The forgiveness, confidence, healing and restoration that God offers can move from idea to reality through embracing two attitudes: repentance and faith.

Repentance. Jesus' call to people was 'repent and believe' (Mark 1:15). In the Bible, being able to repent is the first step that "leads to life." (Acts 1:18). It is much more than feeling sorry. It means 'return' or 'turn round', literally to change your mind. It is the decision to go God's way – the first essential step towards change and healing.

Faith. The Bible repeatedly contrasts the fruitless path of trying to be put right with God by obeying the law with instead receiving His righteousness through faith. Receiving God's salvation is about turning towards Him and having confident trust, "faith in" Christ. John's gospel is written so that, "...you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:30-31)

If repentance and faith are needed, confession can help us to be rooted in these attitudes in our daily lives. Confession is a practice or habit through which we can consciously receive God's forgiveness. It involves repenting and placing our faith in the faithfulness of Jesus.



Why do we need to have a habit of confessing? “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) There is a symbolic way we can see this in the Bible. During the Last Supper when Simon Peter refuses to let Jesus wash his feet Christ replies, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean...” (John 13: 8-10) The preacher Charles Spurgeon linked this to confession when he said, “We have been cleansed once for all, but our feet still need to be washed from the defilement of our daily walk as children of God.” Confession is a practice for those who are fundamentally “already clean”.

How do we do it? In terms of the attitude we bring to confession, the word used in the Bible means ‘to say the same thing’. In other words, to agree with God about our sins – not to cover up. Bernard of Clairvaux offers this counsel in terms of feelings of sorrow: “Sorrow for sin is necessary, but it should not involve endless self-preoccupation. You should dwell also on the glad remembrance of the loving kindness of God.” Practically speaking, there is no specific rule about how often confession is good, but it is always wise to keep short accounts with God and to give time to think through the things we need or want to confess. We are, first and foremost, confessing to God alone: “I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity...” (Psalm 32:5)

However, the Bible also offers the possibility of confessing before other people, whether this is through using particular forms of words when we gather, or with a specific person. “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16) Some Christians - Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and some Anglicans – do this through the sacrament of confession (also called the sacrament of penance or the sacrament of reconciliation), as they confess their sins to a priest. Others find they can confess to trusted Christian friends.

The purpose of the practice of confession is **greater closeness to God**, opening us up to God working in our lives as we are “entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God.” (Pope John Paul II)

It deals with pride and brings psychological wholeness... “it breaks the build up of shame within which happens when we hoard our mistakes and keep them to ourselves. The fear of rejection gets shattered when we sit in front of someone and get to hear the sweet words, ‘You are forgiven’.” (KXC website).

It rebels against individualism by opening us up to one another and creating community. It helps us acknowledge that our behaviours have consequences while healing the “loneliness of sin”. “Sin wants to be alone with people. It takes them away from the community. The more lonely people become, the more destructive the power of sin over them....Sin must be brought into the light. What is unspoken is said openly and confessed. All that is secret and hidden comes to light.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Discuss: How does confession not become a duty or something we do by rote?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Daniel 9: 4-9 which describes Daniel's prayer of confession.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:

What does this passage teach me about God?

What does this passage teach me about people?

How does this passage call me to obey God?

What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/Nf80P9bULPU>

What struck you as important in the video?



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

Almighty God,
long-suffering and of great goodness:
I confess to you,
I confess with my whole heart
my neglect and forgetfulness of your commandments,
my wrong doing, thinking, and speaking;
the hurts I have done to others,
and the good I have left undone.
O God, forgive me, for I have sinned against you;
and raise me to newness of life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse us from our sins,
and restore us in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.





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